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AUTHOR Sigler, E. A., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Announcing a successful conclusion to the operations of the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Task Force on Management Structure and Administration Staffing, this presentation by one member of that task force introduces the problem addressed by the study and the central theme of the resulting monograph, which will be published soon. The problem is basically one of increasing pressure on the school principal, largely as a result of modern demands on education, coupled with a continuing lack of the decision-making authority the principal needs if he is to shoulder the new responsibilities. If principals make efforts to obtain and use improved management skills, it could help them convince higher-level educational managers that they are capable of assuming authority, which in turn might make it easier for principals to reorganize their work loads and school management structures to reflect new legal strictures and other demands. (Author/MGD)

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NASSP Small Group Discussion Presentation Concerning
Task Force Report on Management Structure and
Administration Staffing

"Secondary School Management Problems in the 1970's"

by E. A. Sigler, Jr.

Most of you here today are familiar with the Pulitzer prize winning play by Thornton Wilder entitled "Our Town." The setting for this American classic is Grovers Corners, New Hampshire and the main character is Emily, a member of a traditional family in this community. In Act III of the play just following Emily's death, she expresses an intense desire to return to earth and relive at least one day of her life. Her wish is granted and she chooses for her special day her 12th birthday. On Emily's return to earth, she views the normal daily activities and events in a much different perspective. Instead of simply accepting things as they were in her normal daily routine, she is much more cognizant of and concerned with what might have been. Emily comments "It all goes so fast. I didn't realize. People on earth are blind." As I think about Emily's simple but poignant observation of life and living, I realize that it is very analogous to the observations a secondary school principal might make if he were permitted to return as Emily did.

As principals, we are keenly aware that indeed it does all go so fast. And because it does, we are prone to accept things as they are instead of considering what they might be. Because our days are filled with so many and such varied activities and events, we have simply modified our daily routine to try and compensate for the many changes which have occurred during the past decade that have so drastically influenced our job. These changes have taken place so rapidly, we have become blinded to the fact that the management system under which most of us presently operate, has

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become extremely obsolescent. Consequently, we find ourselves experiencing a serious management overload, and it has an adverse effect on the manner in which we are able to perform in our job. While the analogy I have made is oversimplified, the fact remains - we operate under a management system that is outdated.

Numerous changes in social and educational conditions today have resulted increased demands and pressures on the principal of the 70's. For example, the expectations of parents and other community constituents, have changed drastically. Todays citizens are more outcome oriented; they demand observable results. They want schools to maintain order and discipline, but they want to specify that this be done in an atmosphere of freedom and permissiveness. Also, there seems to be conflicting goals within the ranks of school patrons. On the one hand, some parents want schools to concentrate on teaching the basic skills and test score improvement, while others want an expanded elective curriculum, reduced graduation requirements, and an extra-curricular program that places heavy emphasis on athletics, music, and other related activities. Too, parents are demanding more and more of the principal's time to resolve conflicts in all facets of the school program. The principal, indeed, does have a very high presence dependence.

An even more contemporary set of problems involves enrollment declines and court precedents. As enrollments decline, there is an increasing demand to cut staff. As teacher union contracts are negotiated, the principal finds himself in a position of reduced authority. Current legislative and statutory changes, such as the Freedom of Information Act, the mainstraining of the handicapped student, Title IX, just to name a few, have all contributed to the problem.

But perhaps most significant of all is the change in major task requirements for a principal today as compared with the principal of a decade ago. We are attempting, for example, to supervise and formally evaluate an excessive number of teachers since the overall size of schools has increased. In teacher evaluation as well as student discipline problems, every decision must be documented with factual information and put in writing so that each party has access to the information which led to the decision. Compliance with due process requirements in both student suspensions and teacher dismissals requires an inordinate amount of time on the part of the chief leader of the school. Because of the increase in the complexity of the average high school operation, principals have been required to double or triple the amount of paper work performed in the form of reports, requests, and proposals of all types. Additionally, he has had to develop sophisticated communication and information systems so he can disseminate timely information to the public as well as his staff. The system must include a "feedback" mechanism which can be used to assist the principal in the decision making process.

Finally, the "hue and cry" for increased accountability has brought with it a whole new set of problems and constraints which only increases the dilemma of the principal. Recent research published in the literature has confirmed just how important the role of the principal is to the maintenance of a quality school. As the principal becomes overburdened with responsibilities and diversified tasks, his effectiveness in the performance of his job has to be drastically affected.

While we are all aware of the increasing responsibilities of the principalship, we are equally aware of the paradoxical situation in which the mid-manager of an educational institution finds himself. Responsibilities are numerous, but resources, personnel, authority, and other factors which affect job proficiency are often lacking. If we are to function as

efficient modern managers, we must have the authority to play a very prominent role in making decisions related to our program. Is this feasible to expect? Are the constraints on our top level managers too great to delegate this kind of authority to the principal of a school? As a mid-manager will we ever be able control our own destiny? Favorable responses to these questions may not be forthcoming at the present time; however we must make an assiduous effort to foster an optimum climate that will change the thinking and actions of top level managers. To effect such a change we need to (1) better acquaint ourselves with knowledge about good management techniques, (2) focus attention on improvement of managerial skills, and (3) express confidence in ourselves and our ability to handle these responsibilities.

Cognizant of the principal's plight and realizing his need for vital assistance, the leadership of the NASSP decided that it was time for action. It took steps to organize a Task Force to do something about the problem. The Task Force consists of seven persons - three from public education (all of which were secondary school principals), one from higher education, and three outstanding management specialists. Purposes of the Task Force were threefold; (1) to identify the task requirements and constraints which are characteristic of the secondary principalship today, (2) to investigate how the management experience and knowledge gained by private enterprise during the 1970's can and should be applied to the management of a secondary school, and (3) to develop a set of practical guidelines for the management structure and administrative staffing of secondary schools in the 1980's. The final report of the Task Force findings and recommendations are to be published in a monograph of approximately 50 to 60 pages and distributed to

secondary principals, superintendents, and boards of education throughout the United States. Relating once again, the thoughts and perceptions of Emily in Wilder's play to the Task Force goals, we do not simply want to describe things as they are and be satisfied to let the days and months go rapidly by. Instead, we would like to encourage educators to explore the possibilities of what might be or can be. We have high hopes that our monograph will provide the stimulus and the information that will eventually lead to a change in management structure at the secondary school level. This has been a working Task Force. Not only did the sessions begin early in the morning and continue through the day, some were continued into the night as well. As these discussions continued, there seemed to be a recurring theme, sometimes stated in different form but always meaning the same thing, namely, the central management problem is that of attempting to handle new problems with old structures and recognizing that too much of the principal's time is occupied by tasks which are seemingly trivial and are not related specifically to the central mission of the school. The three principals on the Task Force, each from different sections of the country, had the primary responsibility of identifying many of the expectations that patrons have for principal, as well as the day to day tasks which the principal must deal with in the performance of his job. Two especially important items identified by the principals as being very time consuming were: (1) the need for the principal to remain visible in the community as well as in his school, and (2) the need to be accessible to students, parents, and faculty alike. The accessibility factor was identified as perhaps the biggest time consumer of all, and some of the pros and cons of an "open door" policy were discussed. The Task Force noted with

interest a portion of the recent NASSP high school principalship study which dealt with the amount of time a principal actually spends performing some 9 identified major tasks as compared to the amount of time he perceived he should spend accomplishing those tasks. In this study, the principal was asked to place in rank order the time he spent in the performance of one of the 9 tasks as compared to the amount of time he perceived he should spend with a specific task. The research team concluded that for the most part, principals felt they spent far too little time in both short range and long range planning as well as in the development of goals and objectives for the specific school unit.

Of the numerous indelible impressions that remain with me as a result of my work on this Task Force, perhaps the most significant was the sincere interest demonstrated by each of the management experts in gaining a true understanding of the specific and unique problems which are characteristic of the high school principalship. Not only did these men listen with keen interest to the delineation of the numerous problems put forth by the principals, they seemed vitally concerned and eager to provide us with suggestions on how we might obtain solutions to our management problems. At this time, let me identify the individual members of the Task Force for you. The management experts include Mr. Allen Ballard who is with the Southern New England Telephone Company in Bridgeport, Connecticut, Mr. John S. Dillon, Senior Vice President, The American Management Association, New York, Mr. Joseph A. Perkins, a principal partner with Peat, Marwick, and Mitchell Co. who incidentally happens to be one of their educational specialists and who has performed numerous management studies for school districts and state departments of education throughout the United States. He also is a

former superintendent of schools and threfore knows the problems of education quite well. Dr. Roy A. Larmee, Professor of Educational Administration, Ohio State University. The secondary school principals who participated on the Task Force were Dr. Reed Waldquist, Principal of Cottonwood High School in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Mr. William L. Hoyt, Principal, Stoneham High School in Stoneham, Massachusetts. The chairman of the committee was Dr. Scott Thompson, Deputy Executive Director of NASSP.

It has been my attempt this morning to describe the Task Force and its formation as well as to identify some of the problems that exists in secondary school management today. I would like to take just a moment to make some summarizing statements, and then turn the program over to Pete Perkins, who will talk about some new concepts in school management, how to evaluate current management structures, and perhaps even get into some predictions for school management in the 1980's.

These statements attempt to capsulate the primary problems associated with secondary school management today.

1. We are still attempting to cope with new problems while functioning within the framework of an obsolete management structure.
2. The principal has a high presence dependence, and a need to be very visable. Too much of his time is involved in handling problems that could and should be delegated to others within the management structure, and attending school events that do not necessarily require his presence.
3. We have failed to satisfactorily communicate to the public such things as our needs, the measures of success by which we should evaluate our school's effectiveness, and the efficient use we are making of the tax dollar.

4. We have insufficient supervisory personnel with which to achieve a reasonable span of control. For it is a basic axiom of sound management that the more complex the job is, the more narrow the span of control must be.
5. We too often permit the diversity of our operational tasks and the demands for immediate decisions and actions to force us into a posture of crisis management or fire fighting.
6. Because of declining enrollments and loss of credability, public demands are being made to reduce staff instead of increase personnel.
7. Legal precedents and statutory changes have placed increased demands on our time. All decisions involving teacher dismissals and student suspensions must be documented in writing, requiring considerable more paper work for the school's chief executive.
8. Even though more principals have become more conscious of time management, the expansion of responsibilities has left him with insufficient time for planning and directing the central task.